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CHANGES IN CHARACTERIZATION, KNIGHTHOOD, AND QUESTS OF THE ARTHURIAN LEGENDS AS INFLUENCED BY THE HISTORICAL NARRATIVE, ROMANCE, AND ALLEGORY.

by

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Chapter One: Introduction

Arthurian literature underwent changes in both genre and theme between the 12th and 16th centuries. During this period, three main genres of literature evolved: the historical epic, the romance, both courtly and Christian, and allegory. Several factors--changing social mores, the political changes in England and France, and the increasingly important role of the Roman Catholic Church--are responsible for the birth and importance of the new literary forms. Character development and the roles of knighthood and of the quest itself are the most significant aspects of the various works that will be discussed, and it is through them that the change in literary genre can be evidenced and explained. The seven works that will be focused upon in this paper can be divided into the three literary genres already cited. The historical epics include Geoffrey of Monmouth's History of the Kings of Britain, Layamon's Brut, and parts of Wace's Roman de Brut. The romances can be subdivided into two areas: the courtly romance which includes Wace's Roman de Brut and The Death of King Arthur; and the Christian romance such as The Quest of the Holy Grail and Sir Thomas Malory's Morte D'Arthur. Although there are allegorical elements in the Christian romances, the main allegorical work under consideration is Edmund Spenser's Faerie Queene.

The author's nationality is an important consideration when examining the literature. Geoffrey and Layamon were English, acquainted with English history and concerned with preserving the dignity of England's past. To stress their country's greatness, the authors

wrote their historical epics as though the legend was based on actual facts. Wace, however, was Norman, influenced both by English history and the French romance tradition, hence the inclusion of his work in two categories. The authors of The Death of King Arthur and The Quest of the Holy Grail are unknown, but the books are both included in the romantic cycle of Arthurian literature that flourished in France, so it is safe to guess that both works were probably written and revised by Frenchmen.[1] These five works were written approximately between 1135 and 1225, but Sir Thomas Malory's work was written over two hundred years later during the War of the Roses. Malory had at his disposal the best of the earlier English and French works, and he sought to combine the different accounts and legends of Arthur into one comprehensive work. Spenser was also British, but he wrote his allegory during the height of England's greatest glory since Arthur's legendary reign, the Elizabethan Age.

One factor contributing to the development of Arthurian literature has its origins in the historical and political changes in France and England throughout this period of five hundred years. In 1066, the Norman duke, William the Conqueror, invaded and conquered England, thus linking together the French and British societies and resulting in an exchange of ideas and legends between the two countries. In an attempt to glorify the history of their defeated country, the English gave their Arthurian accounts in factual terms. Arthur served as the answering balm to soothe England's wounded pride and honor. Under his legendary kingship, England's influence was far greater than any that

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[1] Pauline M. Matarasso, trans., The Quest of the Holy Grail (Baltimore: Penguin Books, Inc., 1969), p. 11.

William or France could ever hope to gain. Geoffrey's and Layamon's portrayals of Arthur suggest this comparison with William which will be considered in greater detail in the body of the paper. On the other hand, the French were undergoing a sort of literary and social "renaissance" as the feudal system broke down and the rise of court life began. Knights came to be regarded less as servants of the kings and more as noblemen. The feudal system, which had developed in the sixth century due to a need for protection and finance, diminished as the threat of outside invasion lessened. The knights still fought for their lord and desired his protection, but rivalries developed between them as they became more power-hungry. The focus of society had shifted from war to court society and women, and the concept of courtly love was born.

The War of the Roses, the time in which Malory wrote his romance, was a long, civil war over the right of succession. In writing Le Morte D'Arthur, he reminded the English people of their greatest king who ruled when England was at the height of its glory. The effects of the war were devastating to England, and Malory found a parallel between the war and the downfall of Camelot caused by Arthur's wars with Lancelot and Mordred. This comparison could be used to instill hope in England since the country did survive that legendary conflict; it could also be used as a warning of the disasters that can follow when men fight for the crown. Finally the very magic of Arthur's reign--its prophecies, its miracles, and its chivalry--served once again, as it had centuries before, to lighten the hearts of the English people, to give them faith in themselves, and to provide consolation through a more ideal world when their real world was torn by battles, hunger, disease, and tyrannical

laws by the Church and the state.

Spenser's Faerie Queene, written over one hundred years later, was used for an opposite purpose. England under Elizabeth was flourishing as it never had before. The country was prosperous and powerful, and the noblemen and the nouveau riche were especially enjoying it. Elizabeth wielded great power and influence; she was in the center of the social, political, and religious life of 16th-century England. She was a female counterpart of Arthur because under her England was finally realizing the potential that its people had supposedly experienced under Arthur's legendary reign.

During this period, the historical and political changes resulted in the development and merging of social traditions and ideals. The historical epics themselves display few innovative social mores since they cling to the feudal ideal of a strong king and his subservient knights. The standards for male behavior are chivalry, loyalty, and personal honor, and the most important goal is conquest: winning jousts, defeating opposing countries, and gaining in reputation and strength. Women are considered equal in respect to male-female relationships, but the warriors often feel that too much idleness weakened their chivalric strength. The king was the most important person in this society, for he was the supreme leader both in the feudal court life and in battle. The historians emphasize Arthur's military prowess because they portray him as having surpassed the greatest civilization known to man, the Roman Empire, when he defeats the Romans in battle.

As previously mentioned, the French were changing their society to one more centered on court life and literature, rather than battles,

which led to the creation of the romance. This literary genre was influenced by and consequently increased the importance of courtly love, the idealized relationship between a man and a woman which embraced physical longings in emotional and spiritual terms. The society of the medieval world of the 12th century served as the setting of these romances. In addition, education and literature were no longer confined to the church and monastery, and the lords of the castles formed palace schools and invited the intellectuals of the time to come and live in their courts. For example, Wace dedicated his Roman de Brut to Queen Eleanor, the wife of Louis VII of France and later Henry II of England, while her daughter subsequently patronized Chretien de Troyes.

It was the lives of these patrons and patronesses, the life of nobility and kings, these scholars celebrated in their works. However, the authors combined these aristocratic ideals with various classical and medieval sources; this merging is especially evident in the areas of courtly love and Christianity. Ovid's Art of Love and Arabic love poetry were influential in the development of the courtly love ideal, while Christianity played an increasingly important role in the development of the romance from courtly to Christian as the knight's quests turned from a search for earthly glory to a spiritual goal of communion with Christ. Interwoven among the social and literary aspects of courtly life were the medieval concepts of humanism, secularism, and individualism, and the romances reflect the importance that these ideals had on society.

With the threat of outside attack having lessened, men now began to contemplate their individuality, the uniqueness that made each man different. They also started to think of themselves within the context

of society. They considered how the changing attitudes of their society, such as the increased emphasis on literature, affected them personally. As the English and French societies and cultures became more intermixed, each man sought to find his own identity rather than the national one the English had sought in the historical epics. Classical thought was again influential in these areas as men explored the philosophies of earlier civilizations in order to judge their own against them and to aid them in forming philosophies of themselves and the world in which they lived. The classical revival affected the growth of humanism, a secular movement which asserted the dignity and worth of man and his values. This humanistic spirit was influential in deepening the characterization in the romances.

Courtly love itself developed partially from the idea of secularism. Since physical relationships outside of wedlock were frowned upon by the Church, the nobility of the court developed a system of adoration through which knights expressed their love for the women of their choice. There were three main elements of courtly love: chivalric and feudal traditions of the loyalty of the knights to their lords; a means of entertainment for the ladies of the castle and the knights, either to cover the forbidden adultery or to achieve the satisfaction of flirtation without the dangers of an affair; and the reinforcement of feudal morality or of Christianity, which in turn reinforced sexual tension and led to an ultimate concern for something good, lovely, and unattainable.

The feudal system of knighthood contributed to the development of courtly love, for part of the knightly code involved the protection of and the homage to ladies. As the threat of physical assault to

ladies lessened, the knights transformed their protection into something more abstract and intangible, that of the lady's honor and good name which they defended through chivalry. The knights would wear a lady's colors at a tournament as proof of their adoration of her and of her wishes for his success in battle. This emphasis on a lady's patronage can be seen even in the historical epic where a knight had to prove his chivalric worth before a lady would allow him to pay her homage, but increased even more in the world of courtly love where the lady's love became an idealized as well as a desired goal.

The change from the courtly love romance to the Christian one, and its subsequent development to allegory, is the key to understanding the importance of Christianity in these genres. Wace was the only one of the three historical writers who actually called Arthur's knightly order "the Knights of the Round Table," and some critics feel that the Round Table here refers to the circular table depicted in the Last supper by the artists of the 12th century.[2] There was also a Celtic custom of the bravest warriors sitting in a circle, and Roger S. Loomis believes that this practice may be the origin of the French and British usage of this symbol.[3] Wace is the only author to call it the "Round Table" specifically, and this emphasizes the table's religious as well as military significance. Another important factor that influenced the Christian romance was the development of the mysticism of St. Bernard. This order was part of a monastic reform which swept across France in the 11th century. Bernard's philosophy of

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2 J. S. P. Tatlock, The Legendary History of Britain (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1950), p. 474.

3 Roger Sherman Loomis, ed., Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959), p. 63.

salvation was "through charity infused in the soul by grace." His emphasis on frequent confession, communion, fasting and abstinence, and constant recourse to prayer reflects the ascetic principles of the order. The hermits and monks who explain the knights' dreams and adventures in The Quest of the Holy Grail and Le Morte D'Arthur represent this Cistercian order and its mysticism.[4]

Other important additions to the Arthurian legend which aid in the transformation of the romance are the inclusion of Galahad as a character and the change in the concept of the quests. Galahad comes to represent Christ on earth, the son of the almost perfect knight Lancelot; it is he who achieves the Quest of the Holy Grail and communion with Christ. Earthly glories and fame are no longer as important as the spiritual satisfaction that the knight must seek to achieve. The other knights in these laters works, however, search for material gains and earthly glory. Galahad, though, searches for the Grail for its spiritual powers and he experiences them in their most fulfilling sense. Two hundred years later, Spenser transfers Galahad's Christlike qualities to Arthur in his work. By helping the other knights achieve perfection, Arthur can complete his quest and win Gloriana or Elizabeth. The concept of the quest has taken on a more brotherly, rather than monastic, aspect since Arthur, unlike Galahad, aids the other knights. Galahad's quest is a search for a more personal relationship with God; Arthur achieves his quest through his aid to others. When Arthur and Elizabeth are united, the two leaders of England's greatest eras will be joined both physically and

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[4] Matarasso, pp. 20-1.

spiritually, and England will prosper.

The genres of historical epic, romance, and allegory develop during these five centuries in a variety of ways and for a variety of reasons. The best way to show the changes and explain why they occurred is through an examination of several main features of the Arthurian legends, namely characterization and the concepts of knighthood and the quest. The characters of the legends undergo a transformation in personality as each author tries to represent the goals and virtues essential to the type of utopian society Camelot represents. In a similar manner, the change in the knights themselves, their ideals, and their quests will illustrate the literary transformation in genre. Each of the authors' use of the Arthurian legend, their literary techniques, and the values they think are important can be shown through their conception of character and knighthood, and these factors will explain the reasons for and the significance of each literary genre.

Chapter Two: Characterization

The development of the characters of the Arthurian legend shows the transition between the three literary genres. Certain characters are emphasized in one genre and de-emphasized in another. Some, such as Lancelot and Galahad, are added to the plot as the stories gain sophistication and as different cultures begin to write about Camelot. Women play an increasingly important role as the genres develop; Guinevere is a more important character in the romances, and Gloriana is given almost equal rank with Arthur in Spenser's allegory. Arthur is the main character of the accounts because the stories are based around his life and his court. He is not, however, always the most important character; in the romances he is a secondary figure when compared to Lancelot and Galahad, but Spenser restores his greatness in The Faerie Queene. The changes in characterization will be shown mainly through the different authors' treatment of the personality of Arthur, but other characters, Lancelot, Galahad, Guinevere, and to a lesser extent, Gawain, and their change in characterization between the epic and the romance will be discussed.

To the writers of the historical epic, like Geoffrey of Monmouth, Arthur was the ideal warrior king, superior in battle through his knightly virtues and chivalry. With the writers of the romances, Arthur gained more human characteristics, which were shown largely through his contrast with Lancelot and Galahad. In the allegorical tradition of writers like Spenser, Arthur is compared with the most superior being that ever lived a mortal life, Christ. The portraits

of Arthur do not vary greatly among these literary forms; in all three he possesses the qualities of the ideal knight and king. Yet each literary genre specifies certain virtues that are important to its respective views of the ideal state. This shift in values can easily be explained by the different eras that the works were written in. Each author attributed to Arthur the qualities and ideals that were prevalent and important to his own society.

The epic historians, Geoffrey, Wace, and Layamon, portrayed Arthur as a very warlike, powerful king, and this was done partially to combat the reputation of William the Conqueror. But the social values of the time demanded a powerful king, one who could conqueror pagan countries, warring neighbors, and even Rome. The very terms the authors use to describe Arthur exemplify this fierce national pride in their legendary hero. In the Brut, Layamon repeatedly refers to him as "Arthur, noblest of kings," thus recording for all present and future generations the deeds and might of this Englishman. Wace, like Geoffrey, is not as moralizing in tone as Layamon, and his style is more like Geoffrey's objective, historical approach. Both Wace and Geoffrey treat Arthur's exploits as real, historical events and give graphic descriptions of battles. All three authors acknowledge the legendry that surround the name of King Arthur, but they stress his reality also. By this dual embracing of both worlds, the authors insinuate that Arthur is the product of and an aspect of both the earthly and the heavenly, the real and the mysterious. Arthur's supernatural conception achieved through Merlin's powers, his tutelage by a wizard, his prophetic dreams, and the great variety of legends that surround him only serve to make his earthly accomplishments better than any other mortal's.

Arthur strengthens the ties between the mystical world of wizards and prophecies and the real world of battles and kingship by being part of both. He is part of the magical world of prophecy, and his subjects need not fear it. They can safely relate their own dreams and heed the warnings of Merlin without damaging their reputations as Christians. Thus Arthur can successfully combine the Christian outlook and his own magical destiny, and under his protection, so can his subjects. In a similar manner, Arthur possesses all the characteristics of mortals. He is compassionate and fun-loving, but his wrath and anger swell up quickly and can have terrible consequences. For example he takes pity on the wretched plight of the conquered Scots and forgives them, but in his battle with the giant who killed the maiden Helen, he spares him no mercy and cuts off his head as a souvenir. He is brave and skilled in chivalry, but he foresees and accepts the inevitable destruction of his kingdom. He is the epitome of the fighting spirit, but the model of courtesy and knightly virtues also. He is, in short, the perfect warrior and king of the medieval conception, guided by his Christianity but by no means an allegorical figure for Christ.

An important factor of medieval life and belief that will help explain the eventual transformation of the legendary hero into a symbol for Christ is prophecy. While by the 11th and 12th centuries the British were certainly Christianized, fragments of their old pagan beliefs had been mixed with their religion. As a result, each section of the country had its own somewhat localized beliefs and customs. Different episodes about Arthur are related by different Welsh and Celtic authors, but all stress one element of the supernatural, prophecy. Prophecy certainly abounds in the Bible, from Moses' visions of a better

land to which he leads his people in the Old Testament to Christ's interpretation of dreams in the New. To the medieval mind, it was perfectly acceptable to combine myth with historical fact, and in view of its Biblical use, prophecy only made the legend of Arthur more acceptable to combine both in a religious and a historical sense. For example, the end of both Arthur and Camelot is known from the beginning of each Arthurian chronicle, due to Merlin's prophecy. A sense of fate, of destiny, thus enters into the telling of Arthur's deeds. A contrast is made between man's impermanence on earth (the destruction of Camelot and the loss of Guinevere) and everlasting spiritual life (Arthur being spirited away on a ship with Morgan le Fay and not actually dying). The elements of fate and prophecy are carried over into the other literary genres and given important places in the romances where the wheel of Fortune and man's destiny are so stressed.

Arthur possesses the desirable qualities of a warrior king, and while some personal virtues are mentioned, they are not as strongly emphasized. He is a mighty warrior and a skilled knight, but he is capable of the gentler emotions such as compassion and sorrow. In Roman de Brut, Wace gives this portrait of Arthur:

> He was a very virtuous knight, right worthy of praise, whose fame was in the mouths of men. To the haughty he was proud; but tender and pitiful to the simple. He was a stout knight and a bold: a passing crafty captain, as indeed was but just, for skill and courage were his servants and need:. . .He was one of Love's lovers; a lover also of glory; . . . He ordained the courtesies of courts and observed high state in a very splendid fashion. . . he stood head and shoulders above all princes of the earth, both for courtesy and prowess, as for valour and liberality.[1]

This is a very limited description of the greatest king of England, but the historical epics are mainly devoted to battle scenes and speeches

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[1] Wace, Roman de Brut, Arthurian Chronicles, ed. Ernest Rhys (New York: E. P. Dutton and Co., 1921), p. 43.

of victory or defeat; very little emphasis or attention is placed on the personal life of Arthur. Geoffrey, Wace, and Layamon all place the blame for the disintegration of Camelot upon Mordred, whom they identify as Arthur's nephew, not his son. Guinevere is a very unwilling accomplice to Mordred's desires according to these historians, and Lancelot and Galahad are not mentioned at all. Gawain is identified as the best knight in Arthur's court and second only to the king himself. So while the narratives are alive with descriptions of mighty battles and of Arthur's chivalry and reputation, they only portray one side of the man. It was left to the romances, one hundred years later, to delve more deeply into the emotional motivations and limitations of the legendary king.

Arthur is the main example of the knightly qualities of the historical epics, which focus mainly on a knight's skills as a warrior and as a leader. The romances, however, concentrate on knightly ideals more concerned with one's personal virtues. Chivalry is still an important aspect of the perfect knight, but the age of courtly love adds the qualities of humility, charity, long-suffering, rectitude or moral integrity, and virtue or chastity. Humility seems hard for the Knights of the Round Table to accept because they know that they are the most skilled knights in the world; Gawain and Lancelot especially reveal their enormous pride when they go on the Quest of the Holy Grail. The concept of charity encompasses not only a material or monetary sense, but also compassion and mercy for their fellow man. Here, too, the knights often fail because they are constantly killing other knights in needless jousts; Balin even cuts off the head of the Lady

of the Lake and is banished from the court as a result. The perfect knight must be willing to endure and hide his suffering, whether it be physical or emotional anguish. The knights are adept at hiding their discomfort from wounds and face death bravely; when they suffer emotionally, they do have a tendency to bemoan their lost loves or honor, but this was acceptable in the framework of courtly love. The knights display moral integrity or rectitude, as evidenced by their unswerving loyalty to Arthur and their fellow knights. As the fellowship begins to weaken, however, they fight among themselves, and their loyalties become divided between Arthur and Lancelot.

Next to pride, however, the knights' other greatest failure is in their virtue or chastity. Discreet and proper courtly love is allowed, but the court society is split apart by Lancelot's and Guinevere's adulterous and treasonous affair. Lancelot's desertion of Elaine, who bears Galahad, is viewed with disfavor by the entire court, even though she seduced and tricked him. But Lancelot's worst sin is his breaking of the oath of chastity that he makes while on the Quest of the Holy Grail. Complete chastity is necessary for one to be the perfect knight and receive the highest communion with the Holy Grail, and only Galahad accomplishes that. While both Bors and Perceval are successful in the quest of the Holy Grail, they do not reach the same height of understanding that Galahad does because of previous temptations of their chastity. While on the quest, Perceval is tempted by a seductive lady who is really the Devil in disguise, but he realizes who she is before it is too late. Bors, though, has previously had an affair and had begotten a son as the result.

The medieval themes of secularism, humanism, and individualism are important influences in the development of the romance. The concept of individualism is especially influential to the genres as shown by the broadening of the characters' personalities. Lancelot, Galahad, and Gawain are all Knights of the Round Table, but each is a separate personality. Gawain is the most typical knight, proud and boastful of his chivalry, quick to defend the honor of his kin, his lady, and himself, but by no means perfect. Lancelot possesses the potential of achieving the knightly ideal and believes that he has succeeded, but as his adventures in the Quest of the Holy Grail show, he is not the perfect knight he believes he is. He does not possess the true Christian love of God, he has too much pride, and he deceives his King and best friend by having an affair with his wife. In contrast, Galahad is totally unassuming about his abilities and does truly possess the knightly virtues previously discussed. He is the truest Christian knight on earth, so he succeeds in his quest for the Holy Grail.

In a similar manner, Arthur begins to emerge as a true personality in The Death of King Arthur and The Quest of the Holy Grail. His characterization extends beyond the limited portrayal of a warrior king that Geoffrey, Wace, and Layamon use. In the romances he becomes a true individual with good and bad qualities. He is not the perfect knight or the best warrior; his chivalric ability is not equal to that of Lancelot or Gawain. He feels deep loyalties to his knights, his wife, and his kingdom; as the fellowship of knights starts falling apart, he is torn between these three loyalties. He is quick to anger, quite proud, fearful of dishonor, and anxious to defend his and others'

honor. Because of his great love for Lancelot and Guinevere, he refuses to accept the truth about their love affair, even when it is practically carried on before his eyes. He does not allow his personal feelings, however, to interfere with the administration of justice; he demands that Guinevere be brought to trial for adultery just like everyone else. He is quite pious, and he follows the dictates of the Church--he takes back Guinevere when the Pope tells him to. He is only human, though, and he is frequently torn between his religious beliefs and his personal loyalties and emotions. When the Holy Grail appears at his court, he understands that the knights must go in quest of it, but he wishes that the quest could be called off because he knows that he will lose some of his knights through it.

Humanism is also shown by the introduction of new characters into the romances that had not appeared in the historical epics and by the expansion in characterization of the major personalities in the Arthurian legend. Men began to notice and question their unique characteristics which made them different from their fellow men. The authors of this era reflected this attitude by providing more complex characterization. This trend, seen in the deepening of Arthur's personality, also occurred with Guinevere and Gawain and with the introduction of Lancelot and Galahad. Guinevere is still a queen, but more importantly, she is also a woman with emotions and feelings. She is married to Arthur, but she loves Lancelot and risks her marriage, her honor, and her kingdom to be with him. Although she has a king for a husband and many knights to worship her, Guinevere is longing for the passionate love she finds with Lancelot. As Arthur's wife and Queen, she is highly respected by the knights of the Round Table, and all fight to prove their worth

for her. As the relationship between Lancelot and Guinevere deepens into an affair, however, many of the knights refuse to fight for her to avoid transferring their loyalties from Arthur to Lancelot and to show their disapproval towards the love affair which violates the code of knighthood and loyalty to the king.

Lancelot's sudden introduction into Arthurian literature changes its construction significantly. First of all, through him Guinevere begins to reveal her true character and her own needs when she falls in love with him. Secondly, he is characterized as the perfect knight, but he is not that; in the end, through his adventures in the Quest and his battle with Arthur, he is shown to be only a man, with passions that cannot be controlled so that he can succeed in the Quest. Thirdly, the contrasts between him and his son show the difference between earthly and spiritual knighthood. Lancelot is reputed to be superhuman, but he is only mortal. He has all the qualities that are necessary for greatness, but his mortality prevents him from achieving it. He is the symbol for humanism because his way of life is centered on human interests and values. He cannot control two things, his love for Guinevere and his pride; this lack of humility and chastity prevent him from partaking of the Holy Grail, and he is only allowed to see it. Galahad is the very opposite of the humanistic spirit; he focuses his attention on spiritual, not earthly, glories. He is aware of his great abilities, but does not boast about them. He has one main purpose in life: to find the Holy Grail by leading a spiritual life. All the knightly perfections and virtues he possesses are merely the steps and instruments he must use in order to obtain his goal. Just as Christ, half-mortal, half-deity, transcended into

heaven, Galahad, the son of Lancelot, achieves the highest aim of a mortal, the spiritual ecstasy of communing with Christ and becoming one with God, obtaining through his mortal perfection a spiritual one.

Another element of the medieval belief that was drawn from classical thought was the importance of Fortune. As in the historical epics, the fates of Arthur and Camelot are known through Merlin's prophecies and symbolic dreams. Arthur's kingdom is destined not to last; its foundations are too weak. If Arthur's society had been the earthly ideal, then all the knights, and not just three, would have succeeded in the Quest. The whole code of the Knights of the Round Table is built on honor, but the knights interpret it merely as personal honor, not a spiritual one. Lancelot, possessing all the characteristics that are necessary to achieve this spiritual bliss, is unwilling to give up his personal honor and emotions to achieve it. Arthur too compromises himself as a king, losing some of the loyalty of his own knights since they worship and eventually side with Lancelot in the battle against him. The king ignores Merlin's dire warnings of the future if he marries Guinevere; like Lancelot, he follows his heart. He is willing to lose his entire kingdom and the society he built up just so he can retain the friendship of Lancelot and Guinevere. When Camelot is finally dissolved, Arthur is an old man, and the wheel of Fortune has begun its plunge downward. In a dream, Arthur sees this himself:

> When Arthur had fallen asleep, he dreamt that a lady came before him, the most beautiful he had ever seen in the world, who lifted him up from the ground and took him up into the highest mountain he had ever seen. There she placed him on a wheel, on which there were seats, some rising and some falling. The king looked

> to see at which part of the wheel he was sitting, and saw he was at the highest point. The lady asked him:
>
> "Arthur, where are you?"
>
> "My Lady," he replied, "I am on a high wheel, but I do not know what kind of wheel it is."
>
> "It is the wheel of Fortune. . . Arthur, what can you see?"
>
> "My Lady, I think I can see the whole world."
>
> "That is true. . . you can see it, and there is very little of which you have not been lord up till now. Of all the circle you can see you have been the most powerful king there ever was. But such is earthly pride that no one is seated so high that he can avoid having to fall from power in the world."
>
> Then she took him and pushed him to the ground. . . .[2]

Arthur has dreamed of his fate; all of Merlin's prophecies of his destiny will come true. He reached the highest point of the wheel when he founded the Round Table, conquered the countries at war with him, and achieved peace and harmony within Britain. This is the glory of Arthur that the historians so vividly described. At the beginning of the romances, Arthur is already at this point, and they trace the downward movement of Fortune's wheel. The disintegration begins with the Quest of the Holy Grail since it is the beginning of the end. With the Quest, the glory and perfection of Arthur's Round Table is put to the final test--are the knights able to achieve this highest goal of spiritual, and not mere earthly, glory? Arthur realizes that the Round Table will not be able to survive the Quest; perhaps that is one reason he does not want it to take place. The fellowship of the Table begins to break up as the knights pursue the Grail; some die or never return, some, like Gawain and Lancelot, realize that they are merely mortal and do not possess all the ideal knightly virtues. Of the three who commune with the Grail, only Bors returns to the court, but it is too

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[2] James Cable, trans., The Death of King Arthur (Baltimore: Penguin Books, Inc., 1971), p. 205.

late for him to reform the other knights because the final catastrophe has begun. The Death of King Arthur merely relates the events of the final downfall of the court. Arthur himself does not die, but his whole world does.

The wheel of fortune that prophesies Arthur's fate also appears in Le Morte D'Arthur written by Sir Thomas Malory over two hundred years later. Arthur does not dream of Lady Fortune in this account, but only of the wheel on which his life is balanced:

> . . .King Arthur dreamed a wonderful dream, and that was this: that him seemed he sat upon a chaflet in a chair, and the chair was fast to a wheel, and thereupon sat King Arthur in the richest cloth of gold that might be made; and the king thought there was under him, far from under him, an hideous deep black water, and therein were all manner of serpents, and worms, and wild beasts, foul and horrible; and suddenly the king thought the wheel turned up-so-down, and he fell among the serpents, and every beast took him by a limb; and then the king cried as he lay in his bed and slept, "Help."[3]

Malory's symbolism vividly carries the themes of the fall from power and destruction much farther than The Death of King Arthur. In the latter, only Arthur's destruction is focused upon, and nothing is revealed about the state of the world he created. Malory emphasizes Arthur's greatness by the "richest cloth of gold" and by the chair which is the throne of Camelot. As in the previous description, Arthur is at the highest point of the wheel or the height of his glory; this dream takes place before his final battle with Mordred for the kingdom. But the kingdom Arthur is fighting to retain is no longer blessed with chivalrous knights, ladies fair, and abundant crops; instead, it is inhabited by the most hideous beasts and

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[3] Sir Thomas Malory, Le Morte D'Arthur, vol. II, ed. Janet Cowen (Baltimore: Penguin Books, Inc., 1969), pp. 510-1.

monsters imaginable and covered by a black, foul water. The true character of the knights is thus revealed; because of their lack of virtue, they are just beasts, fighting among themselves for personal glory as shown by their pulling at Arthur. Arthur cries for help, but none is now available; the wheel of Fortune has revolved downward, and destruction is inevitable. Thus Arthur has led an enchanted life for most of his reign; just before he falls from grace, he gets to see the real world of savagery, ugliness, and disease in which everyone else lived. In a way, Arthur's fall, as shown by the examples from the two romances, brings him closer to the sympathies of the medieval people. He too suffers, and now that his earthly joy is gone, his only hope can be a spiritual one. But Arthur once did enjoy power, fame, and happiness, and the people of the 15th century could honor his name and legend and find a source of pride in them for themselves.

Malory's sense of realism is a striking addition to the romance, one which is accomplished through his skillful use of the various stories, his narrative style, and his use of dialogue. These devices enable him to present more convincing, lifelike characters; in addition his explanation of character motivation helps the reader to understand better the characters and their subsequent actions. One example of this technique is his description of the love between Lancelot and Guinevere. Although they know of each other's love for a long time, they do not rush directly into an affair, each hoping perhaps that their love will cool before they have hurt Arthur or that some other solution can be found. In explaining this type of relationship, Malory compares Arthurian values with those of the 15th century:

> . . .For like as winter rasure doth always erase and deface green summer, so fareth it by unstable love in man and woman. For in many persons there is no stability; for we may see all day, for a little blast of winter's rasure, anon we shall deface and lay apart true love for little or nought, that cost much thing; this is no wisdom not stability, but it is feebleness of nature and great disworship. . . let every man of worship flourish his heart in this world, first unto God, and next unto the joy of them that he promised his faith unto;. . . and such love I call virtuous love. But nowadays men cannot love seven night but they must have all their desires; that love may not endure by reason. . . Right so fareth love nowadays, soon hot soon cold: this is no stability. But the old love was not so: men and women could love together seven years, and no licours lusts were between them, and then was love, truth, and faithfulness: and lo, in likewise was used love in King Arthur's day.[4]

The lovers carry on an idealized relationship and realize the consequences of a treasonous love affair. Malory does not approve of the love affair between Lancelot and Guinevere, but he approves their wisdom and their fortitude in restraining themselves for as long as they did. Since the medieval world was constantly exposed to change due to fortune, any stability, and especially that of moral character, was admired. Although Lancelot does not possess the virtues of humility and chastity, he is a good example of the virtue of constancy. His love for Guinevere remains true; no other woman can change that. He loves Arthur until the end and bitterly regrets the break-up of the Round Table fellowship. When the order of knights disintegrates, the foundation of social order has been broken. The constancy has been interrupted, and the only future left is strife and disorder, that instability which Malory deplored in his own time.

Malory's portrayal of Arthur is very similar to that of the earlier romances, but he becomes a more sympathetic figure. Unlike Lancelot and Gawain, he is aware of his shortcomings as a knight, and

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[4] Ibid., p. 426.

he is able to admire the skills of the Knights of the Round Table that he himself does not possess. His one fault is his pride, that which Lady Fortune chides him about. Perhaps he does have some false pride in the great kingdom he has built, his knights, and his queen, but his love for all three somehow outweighs this sin. His pride in them stems not so much from his creation of them, but in the qualities they possess themselves. Guinevere is a beautiful and gracious queen, his knights are the best in the world, and his kingdom is the most prosperous and famous one that ever existed. This is not like the personal pride that defeats Lancelot or the earthly pride that captures the Red Cross Knight; Arthur's contentment is the source of his pride.

Arthur is truly a magnanimous person, believing the best in people, quick to forgive, and willing to sacrifice personal pleasures for the good of the country. He does not believe the rumors about Lancelot and Guinevere; he loves them both so dearly that he cannot believe that they would commit treason against him as the king and destroy the love between them as friends. His honor as a king, a knight, and a friend is more important to him than death, as he declares before battling Lancelot:

> . . .I have promised to do the battle to the uttermost, by the faith of my body, while me lasteth the life, and therefore I had lever to die with honour than to live with shame; and if it were possible for me to die an hundred times, I had lever to die so oft than yield me to thee; for though I lack weapon, I shall no lack no worship. . .[5]

Here he is not boasting of his skill as a knight, but of his honor as

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[5] Malory, vol. I, p. 132.

a man. A similar honor and respect for the laws forces him to put Guinevere on trial for adultery and to fight Lancelot. In his heart, Arthur values the love of Lancelot more than his kingdom, but the Round Table fellowship has been broken, and it is his duty to his people and to his remaining knights to fight Lancelot. Arthur is thus very unselfish because he places his kingly duties above his personal love for Lancelot as shown by his attitude during the war against his once favorite knight:

> . . .He looked upon Sir Launcelot, and then the tears brast out of his eyen, thinking on the great courtesy that was in Sir Launcelot more than in any other man; and therewith the king rode his way. . .and said, "Alas, that ever this war began."[6]

Arthur is able to recognize in Lancelot the very qualities that he himself lacks, and that a good knight should have. Thus the war with Lancelot is both a personal and a political - social tragedy.

Malory focuses more on Arthur's personality but does not present the other characters much differently. Guinevere's regret over what she has done, Lancelot's blighted quest for the Holy Grail, and Galahad's Christlike perfection are described and elaborated much as they are in the romances. However, another important change Malory brings to his version of the Arthurian legend is the increased focus on the Christian allegory prevalent in the legend. Two important examples are Mordred's salvation and Balin's "Dolorous Stroke." Merlin prophesies that a child born on May-day will destroy Arthur and his court and advises that all those children be destroyed. Arthur commands this, the children are put out to sea, the ship wrecks, and everyone dies except Mordred. This is a reversal or inversion of the story of Christ and

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[6] Malory, vol. II, p. 482

Herod, but it has overtones from other Christian theology as well, such as Noah's ark. The ark is built by God's command as a ship of faith to save the believers; this ship is built to destroy those who threaten the safety of Arthur's perfect kingdom. In the Bible, the Holy Innocente are killed because they threaten Herod's kingdom of false belief, but Christ, who will build a kingdom of truth, is spared. Both Christ and Mordred are spared; but Christ saves the world while Mordred destroys it. This incident serves as another example of the merging of Christianity with Arthurian legend which the other romance writers did not elaborate upon. As Arthurian literature progresses from the historical epic to the romance, Fortune and Christianity play changing roles in the genres. Although the historical writers state that Arthur is a Christian, there is more emphasis on the role of Fortune. As the romance develops, Fortune and Christianity become more merged as shown by the Mordred incident and also Arthur's dream of Lady Fortune in The Death of King Arthur and Le Morte D'Arthur. Christianity is more stressed in the allegorical form of The Faerie Queene in which historical and literary figures assume Christian roles.

In the other incident, Balin, a Knight of the Round Table, battles King Pellam and wounds him with the spear that was supposedly used by the Roman soldiers to wound Christ. With Balin's "Dolorous Stroke," the walls of the castle fall down, and the King remains maimed until Galahad, in quest of the Holy Grail, cures him. But it was prophesied that the stroke will cause three countries to be destroyed. In some ways, that stroke begins the downfall of the Round Table because perfection can only be realized through the Quest of the Holy Grail, a

quest in which many knights fail. Though Galahad, like Christ, has healing powers, he cannot save Arthur's world. He can only prove that one of the Knights of the Round Table was worthy of communion with Christ.

Malory's emphasis on these Christian elements and his elaboration of the personality of Arthur aid in understanding the use of Arthur as an allegorical representation for Christ in The Faerie Queene. Through Malory, Arthur regains the moral importance the historians had dwelt on in the early chronicles, but subsequently was attributed to Lancelot and Galahad in the French romances. In the historical epics, Arthur was the perfect leader and knight; the French attributed these knightly characteristics to Lancelot, while Galahad became the perfect mortal, and Arthur was portrayed merely as a figurehead of power. Malory, however, emphasizes Lancelot's faults by not having him fulfill his claim as a perfect knight, while Arthur is portrayed as a compassionate individual. Malory's portrait of the king progresses from that given by Geoffrey and others by stressing Arthur's moral character and, more importantly, restoring his fame and importance which were usurped by Lancelot in the romances. Malory thus focuses on Arthur himself, his qualities and his conduct. Malory is vague about Arthur's actual death, and through this lack of information, he can eulogize Arthur with hopes for his future return:

> Yet some men say in many parts of England that King Arthur is not dead, but had by the will of Our Lord Jesu into another place; and men say that he shall come again, and he shall win the holy cross. I will not say that is shall be so, but rather I will say, here in this world he changed his life. But many men say that there is written upon his tomb this verse: HIC IACET ARTHURUS, REX QUONDAM REXQUE FUTUTUS.[7]

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[7] Ibid., p. 519.

Through Malory, the mystery of the legend once more surrounds Arthur. Like Christ, he is destined to come again to this world, to reign once more. And in The Faerie Queene Spenser makes this legend come true.

Spenser had originally planned a twelve-book work, extolling the virtues of England, with each book allegorizing a particular virtue. He dedicated the books to, and selected as his main heroine, Elizabeth I, the "Faerie Queene." For the epitome of knighthood he selected Arthur, who figurally represents Christ. The question then arises,"Why would he choose Arthur as his hero, instead of Galahad, the Christlike knight who in the romances succeeds in the Quest of the Holy Grail?" Yet Arthur is the logical choice when The Faerie Queene is considered in the framework of 16th-century thought. Spenser sought to combine the religious and nationalistic aspects of his character in his work, linking the good fortune of the Age of Elizabeth to that experienced during the reign of Arthur. He is moralistic and realistic enough, however, to realize that men are not perfect, and using Arthur as the standard for ideal courtesy, he shows how man can obtain the virtues of holiness, chastity, friendship, temperance, justice, and courtesy.

Spenser had several other reasons for selecting Arthur as the hero of his poem. First of all, Arthur is considered one of the nine worthies, one of the nine best warriors and leaders in the history of the world. Three were pagans, three Jews, and three Christians. Arthur was the first and the chief of the Christian men, a king and conqueror, a creator of the best-known order of chivalrous knights. In the preface to Le Morte D'Arthur, Caxton gives this reputation of Arthur as the reason Malory wrote his book; it may well be one of the reasons Spenser also selects Arthur.

Secondly, in The Faerie Queene Arthur is referred to as Prince, not King, Arthur. As Prince, he has not yet suffered the treasons of Guinevere and Lancelot, the deceit of his son Mordred, or the disintegration of his kingdom. He is just the perfect knight, ready to found, in the future, the best kingdom on earth. Christ, too, was referred to as a prince, and he sought to help people gain the greatest kingdom, heaven. Through his aiding the other knights in accomplishing the virtues they represent, Arthur serves to help them achieve the perfection of Christ. Next, since The Faerie Queene can be interpreted on a political level as well, the title of prince helps to show that Arthur is still training for his greater role. He must accomplish his own quest by helping the twelve knights understand and reach the virtues they represent. When this is accomplished, Arthur will meet again with Gloriana, wed her, and gain his true title of king. By this marriage, the two greatest rulers of England will be joined; out of this union will hopefully come lasting peace, good fortune, and fame for the English people.

Arthur himself does not enter into the narrative until the seventh canto of Book I. This delayed entrance, which Spenser planned to use in all the books, reinforces Arthur's symbolism as the perfect knight and a Christlike savior because he saves each knight from peril and directs him onto the right path for achieving his particular virtue. Book I is the most important of all the books about Arthur because it explains why he is on his quest, i.e., his love and search for Gloriana, and because the knight seeking holiness, the Red Cross Knight, needs his help the most. Holiness is the whole foundation on which the other knightly virtues are built; without it, one cannot achieve per-

fection. Galahad proved this idea when he succeeded in the Quest of the Holy Grail; without a spiritual communion with Christ, all the other virtues are worthless.

Although Red Cross carries a shield emblazoned with the cross of Christ, he has not achieved the holiness that he symbolizes. All his other knightly virtues have undergone the tests of temptation and failed when Arthur appears to rescue him. Red Cross has shown no friendship or courtesy because he has left Una, truth and the true church, and travelled with Duessa, the false Church, instead. His vow of chastity has been shattered because he makes love to Duessa. When Archimago shows him the false vision of Una lying with another man, he shows no justice, but doubts her fidelity and leaves her. He shows no temperance, either in drinking the water of the Enchanted Spring or in fornicating with Duessa; all sense of moderation has failed. While he escapes the vain pride of the world, as symbolized by Lucifera, he falls victim to the animal pride of the flesh, Orgoglio. And it is from this final temptation that Arthur rescues him and sets him on the right path to achieving holiness.

By having Arthur defeat Orgoglio and rescue an emaciated Red Cross from the dungeon, Spenser emphasizes the figural importance of Arthur. The prince wrestles with Orgoglio, or earthly pride, just as Christ fought to redeem mankind from sin. He is knocked to the ground by a blow from Orgoglio's club, and when this is done, the veil covering his blank shield is thrust aside, and the bright light blinds Orgoglio and enables Arthur to defeat him. Arthur's fall represents Christ's crucifixion, and the light from his shield is the result of the crucifixion, the entrance of grace into the world. He takes the keys from the gate

keeper, Ignaro, or human ignorance, and delivers Red Cross from the dungeon; this episode can be compared to the harrowing of hell in which Christ sets the prophets and patriarchs of the Old Testament free from Satan. Before Red Cross departs once more with Una on his journey, he and Arthur exchange gifts. Arthur's gift to the knight is a diamond box containing a healing ointment; this gift is not unusual in the romances and represents the Eucharist or grace.[8] His gift from Red Cross is a copy of the New Testament, representing the way to salvation which Red Cross has discovered. These gifts are the Blood and Book of the new Covenant.[9] The healing ointment and the diamond box are especially appropriate for Red Cross because of the physical and spiritual wounds he has suffered. The ointment will be useful in healing Red Cross' physical wounds whereas the faith represented by the diamond box will help him achieve a spiritual recovery.

One of the most important aspects of Arthur in this portrait is his shield. Spenser describes it as not being made of steel or brass because these earthly metals are easily destroyed, but instead it is made:

> . . .all of diamond perfect pure and clean
> . . .one massy entire mold,
> Hewn out of adamant rock with engines keen,
> That point of spear it never piercen could,
> Ne dint of direful sword divide the substance.[10]

From this description, it is evident that Arthur's shield represents

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[8] Edmund Spenser, The Faerie Queene, Books I and II, ed. Robert Kellogg and Oliver Steele (New York: The Odyssey Press, Inc., 1965), p. 179.

[9] Ibid., p. 180.

[10] Ibid., p. 159.

the true faith which no man can destroy. Ephesians 6:16 explains the powers of this type of shield:

> Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked.[11]

While all the other virtues are important in achieving perfection or Christ, the virtue of holiness, as strengthened by faith, is the most important. By carrying this shield, Arthur will always be able to defeat the enemies of Christ. In Allegory of the "Faerie Queene," M. Pauline Parker suggests another purpose why the shield is made of diamond and why it is blank. Since in each book Arthur represents the ideal of a particular virtue, this bright shield can represent all twelve of them because in each book the shield serves as a guiding light in the search for good and the destruction of evil. Arthur is still only a prince, so he is unable to bear a particular motif on his shield. His destiny is unrealized and will remain so until he aids all twelve knights in their quests.[12]

Another interesting addition to Arthur's adventures is his relationship with the Faerie Queene and his upbringing. As in the old legends, at birth he is put in the hands of another family and does not know his true identity. Merlin instructs the young Arthur in various fields of knowledge, while his foster father teaches him the skills of chivalry. By the time he is a young man, Arthur is still unaware of his lineage, but he is a perfect knight, unblemished by and resisting all temptations. He has ignored all the charms of women and love until, on one of his adventures, he meets Gloriana. Due to their

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11 Ephesians 6:16

12 M. Pauline Parker, The Allegory of the "Faerie Queene," Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1960), p. 57.

perfect, platonic love, they do not become lovers in the physical sense. This behavior contrasts sharply with the false, lustful love that Red Cross has for Duessa. Arthur's and Gloriana's love is the perfect love that Malory describes as initially existing between Lancelot and Guinevere. When Gloriana leaves, she tells Arthur only that she is the fairy queen. Again, Arthur's reaction is different from that of Red Cross; instead of sinking into despair and melancholy, he begins his search for her. His search has lasted nine months when he meets Una and Red Cross. This particular length of time has a certain symbolic importance also. Just as nine months is the normal gestation period for a human baby, Arthur's search so far has been the training period for his quests as his virtues themselves develop. Through his helping the twelve knights achieve their quests, Arthur's own devotion, faith, and virtue will be confirmed. Not until then will he learn of his true identity and be able to complete his quest, meeting once more with Gloriana and realizing his destiny as her husband. Both the knights and Arthur must undergo trials before they reach their desired ideal. Similarly, the human soul must discover these virtues and develop them before it is worthy of being received again by Christ.

The personages of the Arthurian legend do undergo character development through the different genres of the epic, romance, and allegory. Since Arthur is the main figure in the legend, his personality is the most stressed, and the treatment of him is the most striking. Arthur changes from a warrior king to a more developed personality to a figure for Christ in the course of the seven works. At the same time, other characters either gain importance (like

Lancelot and Galahad), lose it (like Gawain), or receive a more detailed character analysis (like Guinevere). This change is greatly influenced by the changes in genre, in the social, moral, and political values of each historical era, and in the different writers' techniques of characterization.

Chapter Three: Knights and Quests

Another major change in the Arthurian legend resulting from the formation and development of the genres of epic narrative, romance, and allegory is seen in the concept of knighthood and the significance of the knightly quest. There are several noticeable differences that arise in the legend as each genre explores the Knights of the Round Table and their function. In the epic narratives of Geoffrey, Layamon, and to some extent, Wace, the feudal system of warrior knights remains strong. Their main goal is earthly, not spiritual glory. With the influence of courtly love, however, the French romances stress courtesy to ladies while the Christian romances, like The Quest of the Holy Grail and Malory's Le Morte D'Arthur emphasize a search for some higher form of achievement, such as the spiritual glory that Galahad, Bors, and Perceval reach and Lancelot does not accomplish. With the allegory of The Faerie Queene, this quest becomes a symbol for perfection of the human soul which, when completed, results in a true Christian, or the marriage of Arthur and Gloriana. As explained in the introduction, the various social, political, and religious ideals influence the different interpretations of knighthood and the quests in a manner similar to their influence on the different characterizations of the people involved in the Arthurian legends.

The writers of the historical epics still cling to the concept of knightship as it had developed in the sixth century's feudal system of protection and finance which incorporated the ideals of honor, battles, booty, and loyalty to one's lord. The two English historians,

Geoffrey and Layamon, emphasize these ties and beliefs. Their knights fight to prove their honor, bravery and chivalry. They are jealous warriors, afraid of inequality which would result in one's getting more money or honor from the king. But despite their petty rivalries, the knights are loyal, both to the king and to their brotherhood. This last quality undergoes a transformation in the romances with the introduction of Lancelot because the other knights divide their loyalties between him and Arthur

Neither Geoffrey or Layamon specifically call Arthur's knightly order "the Knights of the Round Table," but both describe the great honor and reputation that Arthur's court obtains and the eagerness of other countries to ally with England, both for protection and glory. Geoffrey fails to mention that the Round Table was founded on terms of equality, but both Layamon and Wace stress this point. When considering Geoffrey's ommission, it is important to remember that both Wace and Layamon were writing about one hundred years after him, and both based their works upon his. Perhaps they believed that the knights would rival one another for power so they felt compelled to mention the equality; or maybe they realized that the omission of equality was a serious one when describing the greatest fellowship of knights in the world. Equality meant that each knight was the same as his fellow knights in skill, knightly virtues, and treatment from King Arthur. This concept becomes even more important with the introduction of Lancelot in the romances because he is a knight who is truly the best in the world and who is a favorite with Arthur. His son Galahad, however, shows that earthly perfection is not equal to spiritual greatness because Galahad's deeply spiritual qualities aid him in being physically

perfect also.

In the historical epics, bravery and honor are the two mainstays of the knightly faith; through them the knights prove their loyalty as vassals to Arthur and their own worth in chivalric terms. The knights are proud of and place great emphasis on honor, whether in battle or friendship, and this honor becomes the basis for their quests. They fight to achieve purely earthly rewards such as fame, reputation, riches, and conquered lands, even though some of their battles are done in Christ's name as a kind of Crusade or holy war. Their fighting spirit perhaps borders upon cruelty, but at the same time it shows their absolute loyalty to Arthur as the king: "....to cut them to pieces without pity once he had found them: this in obedience to Arthur's command."[1] Layamon specifically stresses the fief system that the court was founded upon by his relating the oaths of loyalty that Arthur and his knights take to one other. In the oaths, Arthur swears he will be loyal to Britain, and that he will reward the knights with land and gold, while the knights swear their loyalty to Arthur. This is a clear example of the feudal system of protection and reward.

Another part of their knightly code concerns the protection of women. The ladies are the vehicles through which the knights prove their chivalry by jousts and tournaments. In the epic historical epics, the women have the same amount of social prestige as the knights; all three authors stress that a woman can pick the knight to be her champion, and the knight had to prove his worth in order to gain her favor. The knights often felt that the ladies had a

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[1] Geoffrey of Monmouth, The History of the Kings of Britain, trans. Lewis Thorpe (Baltimore: Penguin Books, Inc., 1966), p. 218.

detrimental influence on them, though. They often feared that their idleness through games and women might cause them to lose their honor; in order to prove that they were still able warriors, the knights would do battle with enemies, such as the Romans. However, in the world of courtly love, women were exalted, and a knight's treatment of them reflects his bravery and courage. A knight proves his good qualities and virtues through his reverent attitude towards women and his jousts for them, not through battle with enemies. This elevation of womanhood introduces an alternative code of conduct to that of the blood and glory of the strictly warrior knight.

The historical epic's ideas of honor, bravery, and chivalry are still stressed in the romance The Death of King Arthur, but they are all centered in one person, Lancelot. None of the other works previously discussed mention Lancelot, and his entrance is an important addition to the romance. It is he who helps break down the feudal ties to the king. The ideal knight becomes the center of courtly life, and his qualities become what the other knights strive to emulate. Arthur himself describes these qualities of an ideal knight:

> . . .there is much in those three men that everyone ought to admire; they are more polite and courteous than any other people, and they are so gifted in chivalry than their equals are not to be found in the whole world.[2]

Courtesy is the key word here, one associated with courtly love. Its importance ranks as high as that of honor and chivalry. Women are responsible for its inclusion, although they are not its lone receivers. A knight extends courtesy to everyone, including the king, fellow

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[2] Cable, p. 174.

knights, and even the enemy. This contrasts sharply with the earlier notion of the knights' cruelty to their enemies. The warrior knights of the historical epics are more ruthless in regards to their foes and prisoners. There are battles and blood in the romances, but excessive cruelty and bloodshed is condoned. For example, the knights that are killed in the war between Lancelot and Arthur are mourned, and the name of the killers are frequently inscribed upon the tombs.

Lancelot's relationship with Guinevere poses some problems to his image as a perfect knight and the idea of courtly love. His adultery has severe consequences; not only has he corrupted his knightly ideals of chastity and idolization of women, but he has broken his bonds of loyalty. This situation is an example of the humanization and secularization themes in literature: the ideal topples from his pedestal when he shows that he has human and earthly desires and needs. Lancelot gains some of his former respect, though, when he gives up Guinevere, repents, and spends the rest of his life in a monastery. Despite Lancelot's penitence, however, his reputation has suffered; hence Galahad assumes the ideal of perfection in the later romance Le Morte D'Arthur.

Christianity plays an important part in the lives of the knights. While it is assumed by Geoffrey and Layamon that the knights are Christian, Arthur receives all the attention for his Christianity and piety. Wace emphasizes the obvious religious significance of the knights through the symbolism of the Round Table, and the author of The Death of King Arthur carries this theme even further. Lancelot, supposedly the most Christlike of the knights, says that God will not

allow any harm to befall him; another important knight, Gawain, obtains heavenly recognition through his knightly virtues of charity and generosity in a dream of Arthur's. Neither Gawain nor Lancelot achieve this exalted state while part of the Round Table fellowship. Lancelot gains public respect and heavenly rewards only after five years of penance, while Gawain's spiritual destiny is never mentioned.

It is only though Galahad and the Christian romances of The Quest of the Holy Grail and Le Morte D'Arthur that these ideals of an "earthly Christ" are realized. Galahad achieves this state solely on the basis of his perfect knightly and Christian virtues. The Death of King Arthur ends with the dissolution of the fellowship of the Knights of the Round Table, the death of Arthur, and the penance and eventual death of Lancelot. The Christian romances treat the ending of the kingdom and the events preceding it quite differently. The Quest of the Holy Grail ends before the disintegration of Arthur's kingdom, but the reader is able to sense that the end is near. By the majority of the knights failing the quest, they have proved that the Round Table is not made up of virtuous, Christian knights. This idea is carried further by Malory because he relates the Quest and its results as well as the final dissolution of the Round Table fellowship. Arthur has not founded a perfect Christian order. The knights are only humans with mortal, not spiritual, ambitions; the leaders stress this point even further by what they are fighting over, i.e., Guinevere's love. The founder and examplar of a perfect, Christian order would fight to defend Christ's love and honor, not their personal honor over a fickle woman.

Rather than searching for the unattainable lady's love or seeking

earthly glory, Galahad the perfect knight, now aims for the mysticism of Christ's love. This notion can be better explained through the religious meaning of the Knights of the Round Table and the Round Table itself:

> This table (the circular table of the Last Supper) was succeeded by the Round Table, devised by Merlin to embody a very subtle meaning. For in its name it mirrors the roundness of the earth, the concentric spheres of the planets, and of the elements in the firmament; and in these heavenly spheres we see stars and many things besides; whence it follows that the Round Table is a true epitome of the universe. For from every land, be it Christian or heathen, where chivalry resides, knights are seen flocking to the Round Table. And when by God's grace they are made companions, they count themselves richer than if they had gained the whole world, and to this end forsake father, mother, wife, and children too. You have seen this happen in your own particular case. From the day you left your mother and were made a companion of the Round Table, you had no wish to go back, but fell at once captive to the sweet intimacy and brotherly love that binds its members.[3]

In the context of the story, this statement is being applied to Perceval, but it can also fit the two other knights, Bors and Galahad, who succeed in the Quest. These three knights comprehend the Round Table's religious significance; it is a Christian fellowship. In actuality, however, the Table has failed in its purpose because the other knights, like Gawain and Lancelot, use the fellowship for earthly purposes. They exploit the importance and reputation of the knights in order to further their own personal glory, and they ignore its religious meaning and purpose as evidenced by their failing the Quest.

This last point is made clearer in The Quest of the Holy Grail by the constant appearances of the hermits and monks who explain the knights' dreams and adventures in allegorical terms. These holy men had a real significance outside the world of the romance; as previously

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[3] Matarasso, p. 99.

mentioned, they represent the monks of the aescetic Cistercian order. Lancelot's fasting, penance, confession, and abstinence after his conversion closely reflect their monastic ideals. Galahad, unlike Lancelot, has not corrupted his God-given virtues and has no need for enforcing this type of life because he already follows it. For example, when Galahad, Perceval, and Bors enter the miraculous ship of faith, they see a beautiful sword lying at the foot of a bed with the inscription that only one person is worthy to grasp the sword. Although both Perceval and Bors are holy knights, they attempt to grasp the sword and fail. Galahad refuses to try, saying "he was standing in presence of a marvel that far transcended any he had witnessed."[4] Galahad can refrain from pride; and this incident through its similarities with Gawain's attempt to pull the sword out of the moat shows the opposite goals of two knights seeking the Holy Grail. It is only until after the meaning of the sword, the scabbard, and the bed as well as Galahad's destiny to possess the sword are explained that he tries to grip it and succeeds.

As in the miraculous escape of Mordred as a child, the symbol of a ship as Christian faith is quite important. This ship represents the ship of Solomon, the Church of God under the Old Law. Perceval's sister, by providing the girdle for the Sword of David that Galahad possesses, represents the new law of Christ. The ship is moving towards the destiny the knights are searching for, the Holy Grail, or the church in heaven. The sword is lying on a bed which is made of white, green, and red woods. White represents the innocence of the Garden of Eden;

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[4] Ibid., p. 215.

green signifies the hope for salvation which God gives Adam and Eve; red stands for the murder of Cain and the death of Christ, whose blood provides salvation for an everlasting life.[5] The bed, like the Holy Grail, thus represents the life which was available only through Jesus death. In a sense, the bed is another symbol for the Holy Grail, the quest the knights are undertaking. All the knights are descendents of Adam and Eve, but only three obtain a closer relationship with God by witnessing these religious relics.

The knightly oaths are also stressed in this Christian romance, but their recipients are changed. This respect and love are to be directed towards Christ and the religious men and women who served him rather than earthly kings and maidens. Battles still had to be fought, but they were against the Devil and evil unbelievers, not one's mortal foes. One had to be brave and courageous but also draw upon God's word and love instead of personal pride to gain this strength. As one holy man explains these views:

> But this is now your testing ground where he would try to determine whether you are indeed His faithful servant and true knight, even as the order of chivalry demands. For since you come to such a high estate, no earthly fear of peril should cause your heart to quail. For the heart of a knight must be so hard and unrelenting towards his suzerain's foe that nothing in the world can soften it. And if he gives way to fear, he is not of the company of true knights and veritable champions, who would sooner meet death in battle than fail to uphold the quarrel of their lord.[6]

This terminology is the same used in the heroic code of loyalty to one's king, such as the oath of loyalty the Knights of the Round Table made

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5 Roger Sherman Loomis, The Grail--From Celtic Myth to Christian Symbol (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963), pp. 185-90. See also Frederick W. Locke, The Quest for the Holy Grail (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1960), pp. 86-91.

6 Matarasso, pp. 119-20.

to Arthur. But like the Round Table, this oath can be explained on a religious as well as a political level. Bors, Perceval, and Galahad all forsake Arthur in order to swear allegiance to Christ; they use their knightly chivalric skills to accomplish this because their foes are not only intangible sins, like pride and lust, but also tangible, physical forms of temptation like the woman who tries to lull Perceval into adultery or Bors' brother Lionel, who is corrupted by the devil and tries to get Bors to save him.

The other Romance that carries this Christian allegory is Malory's Le Morte D'Arthur. Malory's account of the legend is more complete than any other discussed because he covers the entire legend from the conception of Arthur to the death of Guinevere and Lancelot. Because of its completeness, Le Morte D'Arthur is a good source to study the concepts of knighthood and quest and the changes that occurred with the advent of the Holy Grail as well as the final dissolution of the fellowship of the Round Table. Malory's portrayal of the structure of the court and of the knightly fellowship is similar to those displayed in the other two romances discussed. The importance of this work is seen rather in its structuring of the quest itself and in the subsequent fall from grace and final redemption of Lancelot.

As mentioned earlier, the hermits and monks that the knights encounter while on the quest have a definite significance to the meaning and structure of the story. The author places the knights on the same level of ignorance as the reader, he is able to explain the symbolism and meaning of the various adventures that befall the knights and thus reveal the meaning of the Quest itself. The narrative covers the adventures of the five main knights, Lancelot, Gawain, Bors, Perceval,

and Galahad. The journey is similar to a reconstruction of their life and their personalities, either through the events that befall them and consequently reveal their sins, such as pride, or in the people they meet who tell them of their past history, like the monks, hermits, and Perceval's aunt and sister. As each knight continues his search, he finds out if he is destined to reach the Holy Grail. Some are told they will not succeed, like Gawain, and some are assured of their success, either by the secondary characters or the events that befall them. When Galahad, Bors, and Perceval all meet on the Ship of Soloman, they know they will find the Holy Grail and are so assured by Perceval's sister. When Lancelot views the Holy Grail in the castle, he is told by heavenly voices that he has accomplished as much as he is destined to.

A brief explanation of the history behind and the meaning of the Holy Grail will aid in understanding its importance in Malory's work. Scholars generally agree that the legend springs from some pagan myth of a nature-cult. The feast of the Grail was originally a celebration of the awakening powers of nature, the male and female sexual counterparts represented by the lance and the cup. The servants of the Grail had to go through certain rites in order to be initiated into the powers of life. During the course of time the myth became transformed into a moralized and Christianized hero-story and eventually was incorporated into Arthurian legend.[7] The awakening or life-giving powers of nature and the reproductive symbols are transformed through Christianity into the life-giving substances of the Christian religion, the body and blood of spiritual life. Through them man can achieve a new

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[7] Margaret J. C. Reid, The Arthurian Legend (New York: Barnes and Noble, Inc., 1938), p. 129.

life, an everlasting one. In Christian theology the only prerequisite for salvation is to believe in Christ; but to achieve the highest possible form of communication with Christ one must go through a trial of faith. This trial is the Quest of the Holy Grail, the vessel that, like the Eucharist, gives "live-giving" food and drink. The Knights of the Round Table go on the Quest to prove their superiority and most of them find that they are not able to complete the quest. They are not worthy of seeing the Grail because they are burdened by mortal sins, the worst two being pride and lust. Through this discovery, the equality of the Round Table that was so stressed by the historical authors is destroyed. The knights are not equal, either physically or spiritually. Lancelot may have been the knight most skilled in chivalry, but he is surpassed by the physical and spiritual powers of his son. It is realizing their limitations that proves to be the most difficult task for the knights, namely Lancelot and Gawain, who do not succeed in the quest. Perceval and Bors realize and accept that they will not reach the same epiphanal heights as Galahad, but due to their spiritual strength, they are content with what they do experience. Galahad achieves the spiritual ecstasy of the highest form which he explains as: ". . .such a joy of heart, that I trow never man was that was earthly."[8] Galahad is eventually considered too lofty and pure for mortal life and is transported to the Heavenly Kingdom.

During the course of this quest, both Lancelot and Gawain are told repeatedly that they will not be successful, at least not to the same degree of the other three knights. Gawain dreams of the three who achieve it; in the dream they are portrayed as bulls who go to

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[8] Malory, vol. II, p. 367

seek a better pasture. This of course has obvious religious overtones like the green pastures in the twenty-third Psalm:

> He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.
> He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. . .
> Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.9

This verse signifies the blessings of a saved life both on earth and in heaven, and this type of existence is what the three perfect knights seek. After this dream, Gawain goes to a hermit for its interpretation and to do his penance; the hermit tells him that he has not tried to reform and has lived a life of sin so long that it is useless to continue in the quest.

On the other hand, Lancelot has a harder time, but he does partially achieve the quest. He is penitent and shriven early in the quest, vows to give up Guinevere, and wears a hairshirt as a symbol of his contrition. He comes into contact with the Holy Grail three times: first, at Arthur's court where he is fed by it; next, when he falls asleep in front of a chapel just before a sick man is healed by the Grail; and third, in the castle of the Fisher King. This last incident is the closest Lancelot comes to the Grail. He is permitted to see it through a door, but is warned by heavenly voices not to step inside the room. Overcome by the sight of the Grail, he walks into the room, reaching out for it and is instantly smitten. He remains in a deathlike coma for twenty-four days, representing the twenty-four years he has sinned, and when he arises, he returns to Camelot, having come as close to the Holy Grail as it is destined for him to. Lancelot,

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9 Psalms 23: 2,3, and 6.

however, soon breaks his promise of chastity, for he returns to his affair with Guinevere, and it is not until her death and his years of penance as a monk that he finally reachieves the respect he once had as well as a spiritual salvation.

The Quest of the Holy Grail is not a part of Spenser's story in The Faerie Queene, but the quests that Arthur and the other knights undertake are also pilgrimages in search of holiness. The twelve knights each represent a particular virtue which, when combined, will present a true Christian soul. Arthur himself must aid each knight in his quest for the particular virtue, and when each knight obtains his goal, Arthur too will have succeeded in his quest and will be rewarded by marrying Gloriana.

Spenser organizes each quest, as represented by each book, in a particular structure. This paper's examination of Book One, the search for holiness, will explain the form he uses. Each book generally opens with a knight, accompanied by a companion, going in search of the particular virtue which will be accomplished through the destruction of some obstacle, such as the dragon of Book One. During his quest, the knight is led astray by temptations and succumbs to the vice opposite of the virtue he is seeking; for example, Red Cross, holiness, commits adultery with Duessa, the false church. At the climax of the knight's failure, Arthur appears and helps the knight return to the right path to virtue so that he can complete his quest. This structure closely resembles that of the romances in which each knight is tested repeatedly for his worth, and the knights in The Faerie Queene, after their ordeals, usually must take rest and counsel before continuing, much like the knights in Le Morte D'Arthur who are

restored physically and spiritually by the hermits and monks.

As in the romances, women gain an important place in the telling of the story, and they signify both ideal virtues and evil vices. Gloriana, the fairy queen, is good, beautiful and perfect, the female counterpart to Arthur. She is the desirable object and the reward for which Arthur's quest is undertaken. Una represents the true church, and she has all the virtues that Red Cross lacks at the beginning of his quest, namely holiness and faith. On the other hand, Duessa signifies the false church, and she is able to lead Red Cross astray until Arthur exposes her wickedness. Lucifera, the daughter of the Devil, represents earthly pride, and although Red Cross does not succumb to her powers, other less holy knights do. Red Cross is able to reject the empty vanity Lucifera represents, but he is hurt by her cool reception of him and later complies with her vain scheme to battle with Sansjoy. However, neither of these evil forces are able to defeat the perfection of Arthur, and Red Cross is saved from their harmful influence.

One important allegorical meaning of the Quest can be interpreted on an individual basis. As mentioned earlier, the trials of the knights and Arthur are similar to the purification of the human soul through Christianity. The virtues the knights represent and the vices that they must conquer are all obstacles that face a Christian in real life. Just as Arthur aids the knights in the quests, the supplication of Christ through prayer and the Bible can help the individual overcome temptations. Spiritual renewal and strength is obtained for the individual through the communion of the Eucharist, as allegorically represented by Arthur's diamond box with its healing ointment. The

war against sins and temptations will continue throughout the Christians life, and he must be constantly on guard against them. But if he is armed, like the knights, both physically (with the shield of faith) and spiritually (with the Eucharist and Bible) he can succeed, just like the knights in The Faerie Queene do. The individual rewards for becoming a knight of Christ will be the obtaining of these virtues and an everlasting life, such as what Arthur will accomplish through marriage with Gloriana.

In addition to an interpretation on the individual level, the allegory operates on historical-political and religious ones. The historical-political level, as shown by the greatness of Arthur and Elizabeth, is especially evident in Book One because Red Cross' quest is a retelling of the legend of the hero-Saint George and the Dragon. The story of St. George has a religious meaning also because it symbolizes the struggle of grace over sin and death, the church over the world, Christ over Satan, all of which are themes of the Christian romance.[10] In a wider sense, the religious level of The Faerie Queene represents the triumph of Christianity, as symbolized by Arthur, over the evil forces of the world, such as Archimago, Orgoglio, and Duessa.

Thus for a period of over five hundred years, various authors drew upon a declining and obsolete social system to portray the various political, social, and religious changes of their eras. The feudal days of a warrior king and his fighting knights were past history even at the time Geoffrey, Wace, and Layamon wrote their chronicles; by the Elizabethan age of Spenser, knighthood served only an honorary

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[10] Spenser, p. 13.

function. Why did these seven authors use knighthood, quests, and a feudal society to portray the turmoil of their own times? There are several factors and theories which might explain the advantages of using an early medieval setting.

First, the authors were all writing about the past, about the legendary, fairy tale world of King Arthur and his court. Even though the problems that the knights, king, and queen faced reflected the problems of modern times, an ancient background was more effective in keeping up the mystery that surrounded Arthur's name and fame. Since the authors were British and French, a central setting in both time and place was effective in aiding cohesiveness to the diverse cycles of legends.

The narrative epic authors wrote their legends to commemorate England's greatness, and the use of a feudal setting with nobility such as knights and their search for unattainable goals added respect and honor to England's past. Spenser, and to some extent Malory, chose the Arthurian legend to their own hopes for contemporary England for a similar reason. The fame and glory of knighthood could only serve to enhance England's reputation and give its people hope. Malory wanted his account to serve as a source of inspiration during the troubled times of war; Spenser hoped to further glorify England's greatness by it with her other great ruler.

Even in modern times, a story with knights, castles, and quests has a romantic connotation, and the writers of the French romances found Arthurian era was a perfect background for their tales of courtly love and, later, the search for Christianity. The concepts of knighthood, quests, and the reputation of Arthur and Lancelot added a magical

quality to the world they wished to portray. When promoting a search for Christian virtues especially, the greatness of these legends could serve to inspire the common man in seeking a more Christian life.

Using a familiar, old literary background for presenting new genres also helped the authors in gaining public acceptance of their works. By merging different values with an older, accepted tradition, the authors would have their works more easily accepted in the literary world. The range of Arthurian legends and materials was great, and the innovative authors could add new characters and de-emphasize others in presenting their social, political, and religious views. Even though the ideals and themes of the legend might change through the various genres, the greatness and magic of Arthur and his world would continue to endure.

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